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## White House Watch

### Mondale At Work

#### EXCERPT

Twice a week on the recent average, the President's appointments list has shown meetings in the Oval Office with Mondale, CIA director Stansfield Turner, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, the adviser for national security affairs. The purpose of these meetings is to review and direct, largely under Mondale's supervision, a continuing study of the entire national intelligence system that the President announced some weeks ago without reference to the Vice President. Mondale has also been asked to conduct, and up to this writing has conducted in secrecy with the help of NSC, State and Defense department staffs, a wide-ranging review of half a dozen foreign policy positions inherited from past administrations. On the trip to western Europe that he made the week after the inauguration, he performed specific tasks that he deliberately understated or didn't mention at all during and after the journey. He asked and persuaded the heads of government whom he visited to withhold declarations of either joint or individual policies toward the Middle East until the Carter administration had time to define its policy toward Israel and the Arab states. He similarly asked and persuaded them to avoid any new declarations of economic policy involving trade and other relationships with the US until the new administration had its ducks in a row. With notably less success, he asked the West German and other governments to forego any further exports of nuclear industrial technology until the Carter administration had worked out its nuclear export policy (which turned out to be a generally unpopular effort to prevent the spread of the capacity to produce weapons-capable plutonium). Finally, and this was publicized at the time, he worked hard to prepare the way for the President's trip to London in May for an economic summit conference at which Mr. Carter intends, as Mondale forewarned his hosts, to introduce a broad range of subjects.

Mondale's contribution to the preparation of the Carter position on strategic arms limitation presented in Moscow and rejected by the Russians in late March was more substantial than he cares to acknowledge or certainly to emphasize. A White House assistant who should know what he was talking about said that Mondale urged the President to make his elaborate, drastic and revolutionary "comprehensive proposal" for reductions in previously agreed nuclear armament levels—the proposal that the Soviets abruptly rejected—first in priority among the two alternative proposals submitted to the Russians before the Vice President knew how M

When this report was mentioned to Mondale, he said with discernible disturbance and alarm, "There is absolutely no truth to that. The comprehensive proposal was HIS," emphatically meaning Jimmy Carter's and nobody else's. He said that President-elect Carter made it clear in November that he intended to find out with his first and principal SALT proposal whether the Russians are interested in reducing rather than merely containing the present levels of nuclear arms. The Vice President readily confirmed, however, that he urged the President before the Moscow talks opened to stick with his proposals for substantial reductions in the levels agreed upon by Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger at Vladivostok in 1974, in the event that the Russians initially rejected the proposals as of course they did. If my information to the effect that Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin has been saying in Washington that his government absolutely will not discuss or negotiate any agreement on the basis of the Carter comprehensive proposal is correct, Mondale's advice could be among the worst advice the President has received on any subject. But Mondale is proud of offering it and at this writing expects the President to heed it, come hell or a renewed nuclear arms race.

Vice Presidents are by law members of the National Security Council, so there is nothing unusual in Mondale attending NSC meetings when he is in Washington. What is unprecedented is that he attends most of the meetings of the working NSC committees that review general policy matters and that authorize and oversee, among other things, covert intelligence operations. As the second-ranking Democrat on the Senate select committee (the Church committee) that investigated CIA and other intelligence abuses, Mondale got a look at what one of his assistants calls "the underside of foreign affairs." When Senator Church was campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination and Senator Philip Hart of Michigan was dying of cancer, Mondale ran the investigating committee and so qualified himself for the intelligence operations study he is supervising for the President. This assignment and his review of major foreign policy positions might be supposed to bring him into conflict with Brzezinski. The sight of the Vice President and Brzezinski wandering easily between and into each other's adjoining offices and chatting chummily in the corridors of the White House West Wing supports the story that they work together in harmony.

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